



# **FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA.**

BY  
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world would either sink or swim together. To-day, in a different situation, I might say that in a free world no country can be enslaved for any length of time. We are living in a world which may not as yet be altogether free, but which is advancing on the road to freedom; therefore, India can have hope to be free also. Looking at things from that angle, one can give a less pessimistic answer to the question about the future of democracy in India.

But nothing happens by itself. The world we live in is the creation of man. We have to live in the kind of world we make ourselves. The perspective can only guide our steps. If we look to the future of India in the perspective of the world as a whole, and get the hopeful picture of democracy asserting herself in India also, then we should not stand by as passive spectators, but we must also participate in the process, and everyone of us must contribute his quota for helping Indian democracy also to assert herself in course of time.

In order to ascertain what role we shall have to play, what each one of us can do, we shall have to take a realistic view of the situation. When we do that, we must confess that for the moment, unless something unexpected happens,

unless our concerted efforts will be able to turn the tide, the future of democracy is clouded by grave dangers. For the moment, there is a good deal of intolerance in the public life of our country. We all talk about freedom, but we are very reluctant to allow each other to have freedom. For some reason or other, a considerable section of the people of the country have convinced themselves that in a vast country like India, with a population of 400 million, with endless divisions and variations, there cannot be room for more than one political party. There was a time when Europe was alarmed by the slogan "One Country, One Party, One Leader". I wonder how many of the Indians who may be dreaming of democracy have taken note of the fact that that slogan, and the danger it brings with it, is already raised in our country also. Democracy does not mean just counting of heads. If democracy is supposed to be the rule by the majority, it implies that in every country there are diverse elements. As soon as, for one reason or another, the proposition is made that a nation should be organised into one party, with one programme, under one leader, we must say goodbye to democracy. Because, that will mean suppression of minorities, and 49 percent of a

people can be called a minority. And if 49 per cent of a people did not agree with the cry of national unity, majority of 51 percent, with the slogan "One Country, One Party, One Leader", would suppress the freedom of the 49 percent minority. A political system which will allow the suppression of the 49 percent at the behest of the 51 percent, cannot be a democratic system.

Owing to the peculiar political position of our country, this tradition of the entire people being represented by one party acquired a certain amount of plausibility. Our country was ruled by a foreign power. That was the immediate obstacle on the road to progress and freedom of the people. In those circumstances, it was assumed that the entire people could be united into one party and make a united effort to remove the immediate obstacle to freedom. This appeared to be a very plausible proposition. But the removal of that obstacle is only the immediate task of the movement for freedom of the people. It is not the goal. The goal is freedom. As soon as the obstacle is removed, and the goal of freedom comes within reach, freedom ceases to be a common goal for all. Immediately, the vast army of 400 million people breaks up into different detachments, each with

a different goal and each wanting to go in its own way.

Until now perhaps it was natural and inevitable for us to have neglected this distant view of our political goal. But having conducted the struggle of freedom for a quarter of a century, we can no longer say that the goal of freedom is as distant as it was previously. We are supposed to be on the threshold of freedom. If that is the case, then it is time for us to think what kind of freedom we want, and for whose freedom we are fighting.

This question naturally arises from a realistic view of the Indian situation. In that respect, the Indian situation is not different from that in any other country. Like all other peoples, the Indian people is divided not only in religious communities, but also in social classes. The division in religious communities is already sharp, and unity on that front is an idle dream for the time being. The division of the Indian people into classes is even more irreconcilable and deeper; it cuts across the religious communities themselves. There are landlords and peasants, capitalists and workers; there are big traders and small traders; there are employers and employees. All of them may feel that the



present political system is harmful for them all, and agree to unite against it. But as soon as it will go, the landlords will not forego their privileges; the capitalists will want to make more profits; the workers will want higher wages; the peasants will want to pay less rents and taxes; the employees will want more salary, so on and so forth. How are we going to compromise, reconcile and harmonise these aspirations? If the capitalists are to make more profit, they cannot give higher wages to the workers, and the freedom of the former will mean more slavery for the latter. Freedom for the peasants, who constitute ninety percent of the people, will mean encroachment on the privileges of the landlords. The interests of almost any two sections of the people preclude them from having an identical picture of freedom.

Now, if all these classes of people, in the given situation, are united in one political party it is only natural that such a party will be dominated by those people who control the economic life of the country, who have money to spend. If India will attain the goal of political freedom as a united army under the leadership of such a party, freedom will mean capture of power by the propertied upper classes

who control that political party. It will be the freedom of a small minority. As the upper class minority of landlords, financiers, industrialists and big merchants can retain their present privileged position and thrive more only at the cost of the toiling majority, in possession of unrestricted political power they will certainly not forego their privileges. Consequently, the position of the vast majority of the people will not improve.

We must think hard if that is the goal we are fighting for. If we stick to the idea of "One Party, One Programme, One Leader", we cannot have any other freedom than that. And if you will be satisfied with that kind of freedom, if you will put forward the facile argument that "Let us get rid of the foreigners first and then we shall see", well, then let us not talk about freedom and democracy; because that kind of political independence will mean no freedom and no democracy.

We shall have to make up our mind. It is not a choice between independence and foreign domination; the choice is between mere political independence and people's freedom. Those who want freedom, who stand for democracy, are not

opposed to independence. But they fight for national independence with the object of establishing freedom and democracy. Those who will not look beyond independence, are not necessarily committed to the goal of people's freedom and democracy,

For the 'moment, the political life of our country is dominated by the latter type of people. Therefore the future of democracy appears to be so dark. Democracy is supposed to be a Western idea. It may be argued : Why should India be fascinated by the out-landish idea of democracy ? As a matter of fact, democracy is at a discount in our country. The mythical Ramraj or the legendary "Vikramaraj" is said to be the ideal State. Ramraj might have been anything; but certainly it was not a democratic regime. "Ramraj" under modern conditions might be at best a benevolent despotism; certainly not democratic freedom.

If we take note of that danger, we shall have to think not in terms of conventional ideas, but to look at things concretely. Let us not talk about democracy and parliamentarism. As a matter of fact, there is no reason why India should not evolve a form of political regime

which will be very much different from the systems known in other parts of the world, and thereby make a contribution to the development of political thought and practice. If we believe that western parliamentary democracy is not applicable to India, if we also believe that the legendary Golden Age cannot be restored in India, then we shall have to think out concretely a political system which can be established in our country in preference to the western parliamentary democracy as well as the legendary Golden Age.

The president of this meeting remarked that in the beginning of the war the world had to choose between democracy and hypocrisy. I may add that democracy, until now, has been more of hypocrisy than real democracy. Why should we in India travel that way? Let us blaze a new trail, and contribute to the ultimate success of the world-historic struggle for the establishment of genuine democracy. For that purpose, we shall have to think out a political system which will be free from the defects of formal parliamentarism. It won't do simply to decry democracy as a western idea.

Take the question of transfer of power. All agree that power must be transferred to Indians.

But how will it be done? How will a new Constitution be framed? These questions of procedure are vital. They cannot be ignored. Sooner or later, power is going to be transferred or captured. We shall have to visualise how that process is going to take place. If the British sit tight and we can only pass resolutions, power will never be transferred. Who is to be blamed for that. I do not know. I only state a fact. The British sit tight and tell us to create a certain condition, and thereupon take over power, On our side, the parties to whom the offer is made disagree more and more every day, and complain that the British do not want to part with power.

We have to get reconciled to the idea that no body in possession of power ever transfers it voluntarily, out of the fulness of their heart. The British are not angels. Why then should we expect them to do what none can be expected to do? The process of transfer of power has not only to be initiated but forced from our side. Until now, this has not been done. Transfer of power means substitution of one State by another. State is the political organisation of society. We have until now had an imperialist State, buttressed on certain estab-

lished property relations. If this State is to be subverted and replaced by another State, that process presupposes subversion also of the established social relations, and their substitution by another set of social relations. Transfer of political power, therefore, means a revolution. Revolution means a radical reorganisation of society, which is conditional upon subversion of the *status quo*. The British have a place in the political *status quo* of India. But the social *status quo* in India is entirely based on property relations, and they concern the different classes of the Indian people. The vested interests belong to Indians. We have a capitalist society, with much of feudalism still intact. The upper classes are vitally concerned with the established property relations, and the intellectual middle classes are always ideologically attached to the upper classes. Those cannot favour a revolution, which is implicitly proclaimed by the demand for transfer of power. Yet, transfer of power to the parties who are most vociferous about the demand would mean transfer of power exactly to the classes who have a vested interest in the *status quo*. This contradiction underlying the political practice of the so-called major parties is the fundamental cause of the deadlock in the process

of transfer of power. They talk about a thing which they cannot do. But power is not transferred unless it is captured; and power can never be captured by bargaining politicians. Because, that means a revolution, which cannot be favoured by the classes which dictate the political parctice of the older parties in the country.

That being the case, freedom of the Indian people, and even the immediate goal of national independence, cannot be attained except under the leadership of a party which is not interested in the established social order. We cannot think of democracy unless there is a democratic party. We cannot think of freedom of the people, unless there is a party of the people.

There may exist parties *for* the people; and with all sincerity they may declare their intention to free the people. But one can will whatever one wills, but he cannot always do what he wills. A party places itself at the head of the struggle for freedom; it opens its doors to all classes of the people. The propertied classes by virtue of being rich, capture the the machinery of the party; and consequently, when it comes to action, the party cannot func-

tion in the interest of all its components. That explains the history of Indian politics during the last twenty-five years. Very few countries in modern history have witnessed such a gigantic mass upheaval as India since 1920. One party, during those twenty-five years, commanded the confidence of the people. The people followed it; time and again, at its behest, they suffered and sacrificed; yet, what is the record of that party ? One defeat after the other. And what is the position of the country after all this turmoil ? They are still talking about freedom as a distant goal; they make heroic speeches, but they are expecting freedom to come as a gift, if it is to come at all. When Lord Wavell returned from London with a hopeful proposition they hailed him as their leader. When the Labour Government came to office, they denounced it. What does all that mean ? It means that they expect freedom to come as a gift, packed in a neat little parcel despatched from London.

Why does a powerful party, always indulging in stage-thunders, take up this humiliating position ? The only explanation is that it does not stand for the kind of freedom which cannot be established without disturbing the



social *status quo*. No use talking about freedom if you are not prepared to face, not only the possibility, but the necessity of a revolutionary change in the social structure of the country. And you cannot have the support of the upper classes the landlords, capitalists, big traders and money-lenders, for such a programme of real freedom. Their patronage ties your hands, prevents you from doing what is necessary for capturing power. Consequently even the immediate goal of national independence remains beyond your reach. It can be attained only on the way to freedom.

The people of India as a whole need freedom. They have been dreaming of Swaraj for twenty-five years. They have acquired a good deal of experience. The large masses of people may still be swayed by demagogic propaganda. But there are people and their number is growing, who can think. And I appeal to them. They must think for themselves. The country is really in a deadlock. And that deadlock is much deeper than Sec. 93 in seven provinces.

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WE are going to have elections soon. Are these elections going to end the deadlock? Let us not have any illusion. We have given up hope about Hindu-Muslim unity. In the coming elections, practically all the Muslim seats will go to the Muslim League. There will be other parties who will snatch some seats here and there. In the new Assemblies also, Muslim League and the Congress will not be able to agree. The Viceroy will consult the representatives of those parties about the procedure for bringing into existence a Constitution-making body. There will be no agreement. There will be no Constitution-making body. And there will be no new Constitution. There will be no transfer of power. The deadlock will continue. We shall continue to complain that the British do not want to transfer power. The political atmosphere of the country will be rent by thundering speeches; clarion calls for the coming struggle, for the *n*th time, will be issued; jails may once again be filled. But the deadlock will continue. And none will be able to say honestly that it will be so because the Viceroy

does not want to abandon his autocratic rule. The continued deadlock will be due to the major parties being unable to agree, even after the bitter experience of long years.

Is there no way out of this vicious circle? There is a way out. And that is the democratic way. If we can find the really democratic way, we shall also be able to end the deadlock. The majority of Hindus and of Muslims belong to the oppressed and toiling masses. Ninety per cent of the people have something in common: a very strong bond of slavery, of oppression and exploitation unites them. They can be also united in a struggle to break that common bond, and that struggle can be successfully led by a party which will approach the masses of the people, whether Hindus or Muslims, with the call: let Muslims have Pakistan; let Hindus have Hindusthan; let the Scheduled Castes have Achhustan; but only on one condition: that everywhere the majority will rule and the toiling masses be freed from exploitation. With this call, the new party is sure to secure the support of a majority of the people. But that can be done only by a party which will look beyond national independence, and whose ideal will be democratic freedom. That party must think in terms not

of government *for* the people; but government *of* the people and *by* the people. Democracy is usually understood not as government of and by the people, but as government for the people. That is hypocrisy. It means delegation of power. And delegation of power means surrender of power.

Therefore, we must have a party in our country which will be a democratic party in the sense that it will stand for government of and by the people. And if we can work out a scheme of such a government, we need not slavishly follow the tradition of western parliamentarism, nor will it be necessary for us to dream of a legendary Golden Age. We shall then have established freedom as needed by the Indian people, and that freedom will enable the Indian people to be fully benefitted by the heritage of the positive outcome of Indian culture.

The coming elections do not offer very great hope of any advance in the direction of such freedom, if the political situation remains as it is to-day. But if on the occasion of these elections a party of the kind I have just described,

appears on the scene to present to the people a different programme, a different picture of freedom, at once the prospect of the future of democracy in India will become brighter.

Such a party rising in the midst of an atmosphere full of prejudice, intolerance and confused ideas may not be able to make itself felt very powerfully all at once. But, on the other hand, such a party being the condition for any further political advance, it must arise, the sooner the better. At the time of the last elections, practically, there was only one party. Naturally, whoever wanted freedom voted for that party. If in the coming elections also there will be only one organised party, most of the people will again vote for it, except the most politically conscious, who are capable of learning from experience. That does not mean that the confidence in that party is still unshaken. There is a good deal of disillusionment and heart-searching. But where is the alternative? If there will be another party, which will educate the people by a dispassionate factual analysis of the history of the last twenty-five years, showing that the struggle of those years has not borne any fruit, and explaining that, unless a new way is found no progress even towards

the immediate goal of national independence can possibly be made, and then offer a new programme indicating the only road to freedom—that party is bound to secure a good number of votes in the coming elections.

Do not run away with appearances. Often they only mislead. Forces beneath the surface may have great potentiality, which is ignored by superficial observers or by wishful thinking. In the past on more than one occasion, I expressed opinions which at first appeared to be absurd. The latest instance was the British general election. Few in this country, and even in Britain, believed that the Labour Party would win. I expressed the contrary view. I came to that conclusion by analysing the actual situation in Britain. Far-reaching changes had taken place there during the war. Those changes were bound to bring about a leftward swing in politics. Many leaders of the Labour Party themselves did not believe that they were going to have such a tremendous victory. Many of them were doubtful whether they would win at all. But still, the "miracle" happened.

One of the greatest miracles of our time is the sacking of Churchill, the man who was the

hero of the country for five years. That man turned out of office so unceremoniously, is certainly something approaching a miracle. If such a miracle can happen in one country, it can also happen in other countries. And I would not be surprised if a miracle, of a minor magnitude, happened in our country in the next elections. Judged by appearances, the future of democracy in India is dark. Judged critically, and in the context of the world situation, the future of democracy in India may not after all be so hopeless. The coming election may spring some surprise. The possibility of forces beneath the surface making themselves manifest should not be simply ruled out. Even then the deadlock may not be solved immediately. But after the coming elections, the impossibility of the older political parties ever solving it will become more evident. Thereupon, people who are anxious to get out of the present mess will surely look out for a new way. And if by that time a new trail will have been blazed, many eyes will be turned to that direction, and a new party standing for people's freedom and advocating methods and measures requisite for the attainment of that goal, winning some seats in the coming elections may be regarded as a miracle of a minor magnitude. But that will

be a miracle, simply because nobody to-day believes that such a thing can ever happen in this country. Even a few seats won by the Radical Democratic Party will be like so many atomic bombs to blow up the leaden weight which is suffocating the political life of the country, and to brighten the future of democracy in India.

I have said that the western parliamentary democracy might not be applicable to India. Let me, by way of concluding, say a few words in that connection. I am of the opinion that not only for India, but for the world as a whole, the so-called parliamentary democracy has exhausted all its possibilities. I have not come to this conclusion to-day. Already in 1940 I wrote that this war was not a struggle between democracy and Fascism, if democracy was identified with parliamentarism. I said that Fascism resulted from the inadequacies of parliamentary democracy. And I added that democracy was in a crisis; that in order to survive the crisis, and win the war against Fascism, democracy must outgrow the limitations of parliamentarism and become social democracy. To put it differently, it was a fight between Fascism and Socialism. By Socialism here I mean a departure



from the capitalist *status quo* and reorganisation of society on the basis of entirely different economic and social relations.

Europe is in the midst of a turmoil. The British tradition of parliamentarism is so strong that everybody still sticks to the belief in it. The Labour Government is hoping to carry through the economic reorganisation of the country without departing from this tradition. It remains to be seen whether they will succeed or not. But throughout the continent of Europe, parliamentary democracy has broken down, and repeated attempts to restore it have not succeeded so far.

When we think of a new political regime in our country in the midst of such a world situation, certainly we should not think in terms of a discredited and decayed system, but try to think out one which will be more suitable to the peculiar conditions of India, and at the same time will be an advance on parliamentary democracy.

The party to which I have the honour to belong, that is the Radical Democratic Party, has evolved a scheme for the future Constitution of India which was placed before the country by

its annual conference held in Calcutta at the end of last year. That Constitution visualises for India a democratic regime which retains all the merits of the parliamentary system, but at the same time frees the people from the limitations of formal parliamentarism. In other words, it is a scheme of a government of the people and by the people. The deceptive idea of government for the people is eliminated. This is not the time for me to explain that document at length; it is called a Draft Constitution of Free India. I should appeal to all whose interest might have been awakened by my observations and who are seriously concerned with the future of democracy in India, to study that document.

Incidentally, the document opens up a more fruitful and democratic practice in the entire public life of our country. Within six months the elections will take place. These elections are not ordinary elections. The future Constitution of the country is the issue of these elections. After the elections, the Viceroy will consult the leaders of the parties in the new Assemblies regarding the procedure of setting up a Constitution-making body. Assuming that there will be an agreement about the procedure, a

Constitution-making body will be set up from amongst the members of the Assemblies. So, in the last analysis, the Assemblies which will be elected this time will have the right to frame the future Constitution of the country. According to the practice of democracy, they must get a mandate from the electorate for the purpose. It will not be fair, democratic and honest to go and carry on election propaganda on any sort of issue irrelevant to that purpose. Because, those who will be elected will have to frame the Constitution of the country; therefore, honesty, fairness and democratic practice demand that, whoever wants to get the vote of the electorate, must place before the people his ideas about the future Constitution. We have made a concrete suggestion for the solution of the deadlock. An agreement among the leaders of the parties is a hopeless proposition. That being the case, the leaders having failed to agree, the democratic practice should be to refer the question of the future Constitution to the people. Let the people decide. The procedure of having the Constitution of a big country framed by a few leaders is again an expression of that hypocrisy, that perversion of democracy, called government for the people.

From the beginning, let the procedure be democratic. Let the people decide what Constitution they want. Wise political pandits will ask: How can the people frame a Constitution? Of course, they cannot. Therefore, in the future elections, assuming that there will be a number of parties—and hoping there will be, without breaking of heads and intolerance—all parties should carry on their election propaganda on the basis of constitutional schemes, respectively sponsored by them. We have placed before the people a Draft Constitution; we are explaining it to the people in all detail, declaring that we stand for this Constitution and that, if India will be free, she must have a government of this kind. The whole document, of course cannot be read out in popular meetings. It has therefore been summarised in a number of fundamental principles, and for a year or more we have carried on propaganda for these principles. We have held hundreds of People's Conventions in villages and towns, where these principles were explained and discussed; and when we satisfied ourselves that these principles were finding response from the common man, then only we drew up, on the basis of those principles, the Draft Constitution of Free India.

Now we again go back to the villages, discuss the document chapter by chapter and clause by clause. The result is that the people are being politically educated, and for that reason I have a little hope of a miracle happening in the next elections. Of course the others have money, and money can buy votes. But if a section of the people is really politically educated and convinced, a miracle might happen.

We do not say that we have drafted the best possible Constitution for India; perhaps it is no good. Others may suggest a better Constitutional scheme. We shall be glad if they do. We shall leave it to the judgment of the people which Constitution is the best. Let each party produce a Constitutional scheme and place it before the country, and on that issue ask for the vote of the electorate. The party which will get a majority of votes for its constitutional scheme, can reasonably demand that it should be the Constitution of the country. But we are not even demanding that. Let this be only the first stage. In six months, the people will not have had time enough. Let the Assemblies be elected. After they are elected, let them pass resolutions that all the Constitution which have come up before the elections should be placed

before the country again, and the Government should give all facilities for the people to discuss them all exhaustively throughout the country, and then elect a Constituent Assembly by universal suffrage. Let that Constituent Assembly then choose one of these Constitution and any truly democratic Constitution is bound to win the vote of the majority of the people.

Then the deadlock will end. The British will no more be able to say that we cannot transfer power to Indians. We shall say: Here is a Constitution agreed upon not only by Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Gandhi, but by the majority of the people. And if the British will then really behave like the proverbial "Perfidious Albion", then they will have to face a politically conscious majority of 400 million people whose representatives will know how to promulgate the new Constitution, whether some Englishmen will like it or not

The great war has ended. But struggle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light, the forces of progress and those of reaction, has stopped only on the battle fronts; it is still going on the political and social fronts in all the countries throughout the world. And

until we have won victory on those fronts, the future of democracy will not be safe. We shall have to fight that struggle in India also. If there will not be a sufficiently large number of soldiers of freedom to fight that battle, I do not know what will happen to democracy in India. But just as India could not be free in an enslaved world, similarly she cannot remain enslaved in a free world. Therefore, I have no doubt that a larger and larger number of people will gather around the army of democratic freedom in India and march together with it not only to national independence, but beyond national independence to people's freedom and democracy.

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